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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 0389

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Review 30 JUN 2006

E.O. 11652: GDS
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SUBJ: SERIOUS RELIGIOUS DISSIDENCE IN QOM

1. IN MOST SERIOUS INCIDENT OF THIS SORT FOR YEARS, 5 DEMONSTRATORS WERE SHOT DEAD AND 9 INJURED WHEN POLICE OPENED FIRE ON A CROWD ATTEMPTING TO OCCUPY A POLICE STATION IN THE HIGHLY RELIGIOUS CITY OF QOM JAN 9. A POLICE OFFICE AND 3 POLICEMEN WERE INJURED BY THE DEMONSTRATORS AND ONE 13 YEAR BOY WAS TRAMPLED TO DEATH IN THE STAMPEDE THAT FOLLOWED THE SHOOTING.

2. INCIDENT OCCURRED ON ANNIVERSARY OF LAND REFORM LEGISLATION PASSED IN 1963. IT FOLLOWED A MUCH Milder PROTEST BY STUDENTS OF RELIGION SHOUTING ANTI-NATIONAL SLOGANS ON JAN 7 THE 42ND ANNIVERSARY OF REZA SHAH'S DECREE ABOLISHING THE VEIL FOR WOMEN.

3. ON THE 9TH A MOB OF PROTESTORS ARMED WITH STONES, IRON BARS, AND WOODEN STAVES REPORTEDLY RAMPAGED THROUGH THE STREETS SMASHING WINDOWS OF SHOPS AND DESTROYING PREMISES OF REASTAKHIZ PARTY HEADQUARTERS. THEY THEN TRIED TO TAKE OVER A POLICE STATION, DAMAGING POLICE VEHICLES OUTSIDE. POLICE WARNINGS AND WARNING SHOTS INTO THE AIR WENT UNHEEDED, AND POLICE THEN FIRED INTO THE CROWD.

4. INFORMATION ON THIS INCIDENT WAS RELEASED TO THE PRESS BY PARS NEW AGENCY AFTERNOON JAN 10. SAME INFORMATION WAS GIVEN TO DCM BY COURT MINISTER HOVEYDA AT SHAH'S DINNER THAT EVENING FOR VISITING CODE.

5. COMMENT: DEMONSTRATIONS ARE BEING ASCRIBED BY POLICE AUTHORITIES -- ACCURATELY WE BELIEVE -- TO CONSERVATIVE RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION ELEMENTS (THOUGH NOT SPECIFICALLY TO FOLLOWERS OF KHOMEINI OR TO ISLAMIC MARXISTS AS SUCH). THIS IS FIRST TIME IN MANY YEARS, IN OUR RECOLLECTION, THAT POLICE HAVE KILLED SEVERAL DEMONSTRATORS BY FIRING INTO A CROWD. SEVERITY OF THIS INCIDENT WOULD APPEAR TO ARGUE AGAINST THOSE AMONG THE JOURNALISTS AND OTHER OBSERVERS HERE WHO HAVE SUSPECTED MANY RECENT INCIDENTS WERE COOKED UP BY IRANIAN SECURITY FORCES TO IMPRESS THE SHAH AND/OR USG. BY THE SAME TOKEN, IT IS POSSIBLE TO CONCLUDE THAT RELATIVE POLICE LENIENCY, AS FOR EXAMPLE IN LACK OF EFFECTIVE REACTION TO STUDENT DEMONSTRATION JAN 7, ENCOURAGED MORE VIOLENT DEMONSTRATION WHICH NECESSITATED VIOLENT REPRESSION TO PUT DOWN. AT LEAST IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT THE MANY PROPONENTS OF THE MAILED FIST IN GOI ESTABLISHMENT MIGHT SO ARGUE TO THE SHAH AND PRIMIN AMOUZEGAR IN EFFORT TO REVERSE RELATIVE LIBERALIZATION OF RECENT MONTHS.

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